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ABSTRACT

After reading self-selected books, students respond to reading in a journal and talk about their books daily in small, heterogeneous groups. The teacher guides and assesses students' work by rotating among the groups, offering suggested response prompts and writing with them in their dialogue journals. During five 30-40 minute sessions, students will: read independently for an extended time; write personal thoughts about stories they read; talk about stories in small groups, responding to given prompts; ask questions about shared stories; and use details about stories they read to respond in writing to specific prompts. The instructional plan, lists of resources, student assessment/reflection activities, and a list of National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association (NCTE/IRA) Standards addressed in the lesson are included. A literature circles reference sheet is attached. (PM)

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Literature Circles with Primary Students Using Self-Selected Reading

ED 480 241

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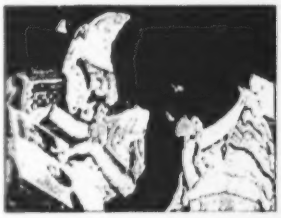
Grade Band

K-2

Estimated Lesson Time

Five 30-40 minute sessions

Overview



For self-paced literature circles, students choose their own reading material, respond to reading in a journal, and talk about their books daily in small groups. The teacher guides the work through structured prompts and by rotating participation with the groups. Students read at their individual levels, while heterogeneous grouping provides peer support. This lesson is a structured guideline for helping students learn to think about the books they read, and to ask questions about books shared by other students. It is especially appropriate for mixed-age and upper primary classes, or for cross-grade buddy work.

From Theory to Practice

- Talking about books supports written responses to reading.
- Sharing books orally can help students recall main plot points and details in the stories they read.
- Working in heterogeneous groups provides support and modeling for students who need assistance.
- Choosing their own reading materials helps students learn to read for pleasure.
- Sharing thoughts about reading introduces students to a wide variety of books.

Further Reading

Daniels, Harvey, and Marilyn Bizar. 1998. *Methods That Matter: Six Structures for Best Practice Classrooms*. York, ME: Stenhouse.

Fountas, Irene C., and Gay Su Pinnell. 2001. *Guiding Readers and Writers (Grades 3-6): Teaching Comprehension, Genre, and Content Literacy*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Student Objectives

Students will

- read independently for an extended time.
- write personal thoughts about stories they read.
- talk about stories in small groups, responding to given prompts.

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- ask questions about shared stories.
- use details about stories they read to respond in writing to specific prompts.

Resources

- Literature Circles Reference Sheet

Instructional Plan

Resources

1. General classroom supplies (blank 8x11 paper for journal pages; 12x18 construction paper for covers; mimeographed directions and questions list; access to the classroom library; chart paper; markers).
2. A read-aloud story that has an interesting character and a clear problem and solution. Two possibilities are *Strega Nona* by Tomie dePaola, or *Miss Nelson Is Missing* by Harry Allard.

Preparation

Before Session One, it is presumed that students will have been talking about books that they read in the classroom, with and without prompts such as the following:

- Who's in the book? What do they do?
- What do you like about the book?
- How is the character like you? Not like you?

Before starting, decide the best way to have students gather the materials they will need to make their own journals. Counting out the papers, choosing their own cover color, and assembling their own journals will establish ownership and promote independence. If there are tables in the room, stacks of white paper and a reference sheet for each student can be placed in the middle of each table for students to access. Another option is to have stacks of white paper and the reference sheets in four or five areas of the room. A variety of colors of construction paper from which students can choose their cover sheets can be all in one area.

For Session Five and ongoing work, students will need to be arranged in heterogeneous groups with reading comprehension and verbal abilities balanced among the groups. If it is a mixed-age class, groups should also be mixed-age. These groups should work together for several sessions, and then students should be rotated, so that they have the opportunity to work with all students in the class at some time.

Prepare and make copies of a reference sheet for students to include in their reading journals, with written directions on the front and a list of generic literature response questions on the back.

Instruction and Activities

Session One

1. Explain to students that they are going to make reading journals. Demonstrate the procedure for making the journals by making a sample, then write the needs list for making the journals on the board for student reference.
2. Have students make and decorate their own journals. Write "Reading Journal" on the board for students to copy as a title.

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Session Two

1. This is the guided practice session for the "Reading Time" and "First Writing Time" parts of the literature circle process. Gather students together for a read aloud story. Choose a story with an interesting character and a clear problem and solution.
2. After reading the story, ask students questions about the main character, problem, and solution.
3. Explain to students that they are going to write a sentence or two about the story in their reading journals. Instruct them to write the date first, then write the title under the date. Draw a large 'sample page' on the board to demonstrate, if necessary.
4. As students write independently in the journals, circulate among them to read their work. As students finish their writing, they should check it with you. When all students are finished, have volunteer students share what they wrote about the story so that students can understand that there are many ways to respond to stories. When students are finished sharing, choose one of their responses, or your own, and write it onto the chart paper sample page. Keep this large sample for Session Four.

Session Three

1. This is the guided practice session for the "Book Sharing" part of the literature circle process. Have students choose a fiction book to read that is at their level. Students will be reading independently for about twenty minutes. If students are not yet able to sustain reading for at least fifteen minutes, read a story with them in a small group. You'll need multiple copies of the same book for this group so that each child will have a book to hold and share in the large group. Students can also "partner read" during this time as another support strategy, with pairings of lower and higher reading level students.
2. Tell students that when they finish their book, they should think about the person in the story and what happened to him or her. Remind them that they are going to be writing and talking about the stories after reading time, and that you will be asking questions. Let students know that if they want to read another book, they need to keep the first one because that's the one they are going to write about and share.
3. After fifteen or twenty minutes of reading independently, have the whole group gather in a circle with the book they are going to share. Have each student tell the title of the book, who was in the story, and something the character did. If a student has trouble answering, ask some leading questions, such as, "Was it a human or an animal?" or "Was it a boy or a girl?" and then, "Do you remember his or her name?"
4. When everyone has shared, ask if anyone has any questions about anyone else's stories.
5. This may take some time, but it's important to set the stage for sharing in complete sentences and listening to others. If you are lucky enough to have an aide in the classroom, break into two separate groups to use time more efficiently, but make sure the aide knows what to ask the students and understands that this is practice for when students will be working alone.

Session Four

1. You will be rereading the same story that was read in Session One, so that students can do an additional written response in their journals. This is the guided practice session for the "Second Writing Time" part of the literature circle process.
2. Gather students together in a large group for a read aloud. Tell them that you are going to read them the same story that they wrote about in their reading journals, and that they are going to be writing about the story in their journals again. Ask them to listen for the problem and solution.
3. When you have finished reading the story, ask students to respond to the story orally. First let them give whatever thoughts they have about the story, then ask a series of questions to help them reflect on the story. Sample questions to ask are:
   - What do you know about the person in the story?
   - What did the character want to do?
   - What do you like about this character?
   - What was the problem in this story? What was wrong?
   - How did the problem get solved? Who fixed it?
   - Do you have a favorite part?

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4. After several responses, remind students they have already written a little about this story in their reading journals, and now they are going to write more. This can be left open-ended, or students can be given a prompt if they need more support or assistance.
5. Make sure that students understand that they are going to write on the same page they wrote on before, continuing their writing. Draw a large picture on the board showing where they should start writing, if necessary.
6. As students write in their reading journals, circulate to read and check their work. As students finish, have them read their writing to you, and then draw a picture that shows what they wrote, either on the same page (if there's room) or on the back of the page. They should use just one journal page if possible.
7. As students finish, have them tell you about their drawings. If there's time, you might write a comment in their journal, or an additional question to answer about the story.

Session Five

1. This session puts together all four parts of the literature circle process.
2. Have students choose their own books to read, either independently or with partner pairings reading the same book. If necessary, use this time for a "guided reading" type small group, with all group members having their own copy of the book.
3. When about twenty minutes have passed, have students stop and write a sentence or two in their reading journals about the story. Let students know that they can write anything about the story, especially about the main character.
4. After about five minutes or so, have students finish up their writing and refer to the "directions sheet" in their reading journals. They should look at the list of questions on the back of the page. Explain that today they will be talking about the first question in their group. Read it aloud, and have them read it with you a second time.
5. Tell students they will take turns in their groups talking about who is in their book and what they did.
6. Have students get into heterogeneous groups or four or five to start work. As they talk among themselves, circulate and listen in, giving whatever support they might need. Ask questions about their books, and suggest that they ask each other questions as well.
7. As each group is finished, have those students do their "Second Writing Time" in their journal. Explain to them that this time, you want them to write about who the book is about and something they did in the story—the same thing they talked about in their group. If students say they already wrote about this, have them expand on their writing with additional details.
8. Circulate among students as they write. As they finish, they should show you their writing and read it aloud to you. Ask each student additional questions about the story they read and/or write your questions in their journals. If the writing needs clarification, have students add more detail. If they want, they can draw a picture on the same page or the back of the page to go with their writing.

Ongoing Work

The process of literature circles is ongoing. Once the process is understood by students, they learn the appropriate pacing. How often groups meet depends on the class schedule but, ideally, they should be a daily part of the literacy time. If time is a problem, a class could have literature circles every other week, or even once a month for a week at a time.

Variations

1. Students who are still emergent readers can be read to and read with the teacher instead of independently.
2. Students who are still emergent writers can draw their responses in their journals instead of writing, and then tell you (or a parent volunteer) about their drawings so that their words can be transcribed onto the journal page.
3. Create a set of more extensive "literature response prompt cards" that groups can use in addition to, or instead of, the questions on the reference sheet in their reading journals. These can be kept in a basket for self-selection by students within their groups, or a prompt can be selected by the teacher for all students to use on a particular day.

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Student Assessment/Reflections

1. Teacher observation and anecdotal notes about student reading behaviors and group book sharing.
2. Individual meetings with students about written work.
3. Evidence of reading comprehension in content of written responses and drawings.
4. Quality of conventional use of language in student writings.

NCTE/IRA Standards

1 - Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

2 - Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.

3 - Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

6 - Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.

11 - Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

12 - Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

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read•write•think

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Literature Circles Reference Sheet

Examples for Directions for Front of Reference Sheet

Reading Time:
1. Read a book silently, or with a partner.
2. Think about the story while you read.

First Writing Time:
1. Write one or two sentences about what you read.
2. Tell something about the person in the story.

Book Sharing Time:
1. Take turns talking about books in your group.
2. Use the questions on the back of this paper.
3. Make up your own questions too!

Second Writing Time:
1. Write in your journal again.
2. Your teacher will give you writing directions.

Examples of Questions for Back of Reference Sheet

1. Who is your book about?
2. How are you like the person in the book?
3. How are you different from the person in the book?
4. Tell one thing that happened in the story.
5. What was the problem? How did it get solved?
6. Do you like the person in the book? Why or why not?
7. What is your favorite part of the story, and why?
8. Who else do you think would like to read this story? Why?

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